

**Rhode Island Department Of Education
and
West Warwick Public Schools**

Face-to-Face Meeting Report and Agreement

March 28, 2002

Overview

A "Face-to-Face" meeting between the West Warwick school district and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) occurred on March 28, 2002. The meeting was scheduled as a result of RIDE identifying three West Warwick schools as "low performing," based upon four years of student assessment data. The "Face-to-Face" meeting is the first step in the ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. It is designed to allow the school district to address its capacity to engage in the four core processes of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the ensuing year.

Schools: Maisie E. Quinn Elementary School, John F. Deering Middle School, and West Warwick High School

Attending from West Warwick: David Raiche, Superintendent; Carol A. Fortin, Director of Teaching and Learning; Dr. Patrick Hannigan, Director of School Improvement; Jeanette Roelf-Rothwell, Director of Special Education; John Scienzo, Principal, West Warwick High School; Cheryl Tutalo, Principal, Deering Middle School; Tracey Shannon, Assistant Principal, Deering Middle School; Dennis Gentili, Principal, Maisie Quinn School; Donald Vanasse, President, West Warwick Teachers' Alliance; Michael Trofi, Director, West Warwick Professional Development Academy; Sean Doyle, West Warwick High School Teacher/Department Chair, Industrial Technology, West Warwick Teachers Association Representative; Jose Libano, Teacher, West Warwick High School; Carol Pizzutti and Jane Drechsler, Teachers, Deering Middle School; David Michelli, Teacher, Maisie Quinn Elementary School.

RIDE Staff: David V. Abbott, Interim Assistant Commissioner; Elliot Krieger, Media Relations; Diana Crowley, Linda Jzyk, and Robert Mason, Office of Research, High School Reform and Adult Education; Diane Schaefer and Faith Fogle, Office of Instruction; Richard Latham, Office of School Improvement; Kim Carson, Office of Special Needs; Mat Santos, Office of Equity and Access; Elizabeth Hyman, Office of Assessment.

RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation

Interim Assistant Commissioner David V. Abbott welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting. Each meeting follows a similar format. The school district is asked to begin with a presentation on the status of school and district efforts to improve student achievement in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. School officials are also asked to comment on the impact of having been categorized as "low performing." RIDE staff then responds to the school district's presentation, and adds comments based upon data analyses performed prior to the meeting. District and school officials next describe future plans to add or modify action plans to improve teaching and learning, and identify existing or prospective barriers to implementation. The meeting is designed to conclude with shared expectations of the respective roles of the school, school district, and RIDE in supporting ongoing school improvement efforts. Commissioner Abbott further noted that the meeting would result in a report to be made public at an upcoming meeting of the West Warwick School Committee.

School District Presentation

West Warwick representatives were given the opportunity to respond to the school performance category designation in their district, and asked to describe existing school improvement efforts. David Raiche, Superintendent of West Warwick Schools, made introductory remarks, noting that at the elementary level, two of the district's four elementary schools were unique in having successfully undergone both the SALT and NEASC processes. A third elementary school received a SALT visit last year and is considering participation in the NEASC process as well. Superintendent Raiche's comprehensive overview highlighted the district's reform efforts, building upon the strategic goals of the 1998 Annual Report:

- Joint West Warwick Teachers' Alliance (WWTA) and school district decision to participate in the RI Skills Commission and America's Choice initiatives;
- Establishment of the Professional Development Academy (PDA);
- Establishment of Standards Coach positions; and
- Key program initiatives, e.g.,
 - Crossing Boundaries,
 - Elementary School Network,
 - Reading Excellence K-3 Program,
 - Guided Reading K-5 (RIDE Reading Fellow),
 - IREAD,
 - School leader technology initiative,
 - Institute for Learning (IFL),
 - Principles of Learning Program (for all 10 principals),
 - URI placement of student teachers partnership,
 - CIM Program/High School in its 1st Year/Self-Study Phase.

Commissioner Abbott questioned the district's ability to coordinate and sustain these multiple reform efforts, which precipitated a series of responses from Superintendent Raiche and Director of School Improvement, Patrick Hannigan. The Superintendent said there would be no difficulty with the maintenance of programs as long as funds can be reallocated appropriately and efficiently. Dr. Hannigan noted that the district's strategic plan is a 5-year plan, developed with Richard Latham of RIDE and himself as external and internal facilitators, respectively. This two-day strategic planning process involved a cross section of thirty-two teachers, administrators, non-union personnel, and students, but no parents.

Dr. Hannigan described the process for establishment of action teams, which are expected to be in place by May 2002. These teams will lead the district's CRP process for the next 5 years. The two goals of the 5-Year Plan are: **student responsibility** and **student performance**. These goals are reflected in the 5-year plan's mission statement.

When David Abbott asked if empowerment of School Improvement Team (SIT) members was a problem, Supt. Raiche answered in the affirmative, identifying turnover among not only SIT team members, but also among principals and central office staff. A need was identified to revisit SIT training and parent involvement in the summer of 2002.

Director of Teaching and Learning, Carol Fortin addressed the relationship among the nine strategies of the strategic plan, the district's curriculum development, and its standards-based instruction focus. This district-level work is now done in conjunction with Mike Trofi and the Professional Development (PD) Academy. The primary work is performed by a series of K-12 curriculum committees, although teacher participation across grade levels has been uneven. These committees review curriculum and assessment alignment and instructional methodology. In 2000 and 2001, Math & ELA curriculum committees worked in collaboration with RIDE and Kate Nolan (New Standards/NCEE) on curriculum documents. These documents are to be presented to the school committee in June 2002.

The Math committee reviewed NSF programs and piloted the following programs:

- *Everyday Math*, (all 4 elementary schools);
- CMP with a focus on grades 5-8; and
- *Foundations in Math* - currently used in gr. 9 with a standards-based approach being added to build skills knowledge.

The district has also focused its efforts in literacy and English language arts. Those efforts include:

- Balanced Literacy training;

- Development of Grades 6-12 Literacy Plan for implementation in 2003;
- Strategic Literacy Partnership Grant with Warwick and East Greenwich to teach literacy skills to adolescents;
- Learning walks as a process of self-assessment to determine if program components are institutionalized;
- Interface between Professional Development Academy (PDA) and standards-based instruction; and
- Use of standards coaches who are selected according to capability rather than seniority.

In addition to the ELA and math efforts described above, the district plans to pilot teacher-generated, standards-based report cards in June of 2002. A special math standards consultant explained these revised report cards to parents. The district has expanded efforts to coordinate professional development with the PDA and Carol Fortin's office. Superintendent Raiche stressed that the district's professional development reflects recent efforts to improve curricula and instructional practices, including examination of student work. This focus requires common planning time in order to incorporate standards-based practices into the culture of each school.

West Warwick SPED Director Jeanette Roof-Rothwell presented an overview of the district's delivery of special education services. The district's School Support System Evaluation was conducted January 8-12, 2001. According to the SPED director, most issues have been addressed through strengthened professional development. Other recommendations, such as visits to other schools, have been strongly encouraged at the district level. As a result of a major recommendation of the School Support visit, a task force representing pre-school, elementary, middle and secondary levels was established to address issues of inclusion via restructuring. A formal report with recommendations will be delivered to the School Committee in June/July 2002. Ms. Roof-Rothwell echoed the superintendent's earlier call for a reallocation of financial resources.

Maisie Quinn Elementary School Presentation

Principal Dennis Gentili acknowledged the low level of math scores, but also noted that Quinn has a dozen new teachers, a 35% student mobility rate, 60% of its students eligible for free/reduced lunch, and a very high, (approx. 25%), percentage of special education students. Supt. Raiche emphatically expressed the need for all day pre-kindergarten at Maisie Quinn and further acknowledged that resources must be located to fund this specific community-wide need.

John Deering Middle School Presentation

Principal Cheryl Tutalo and Assistant Principal Tracy Shannon presented an overview of the Deering Middle School document "*On Target*," emphasizing their belief in the correlation between improvement of school climate and student performance. Specific changes instituted to support improvement in student performance include:

- School-wide emphasis on balanced literacy;
- Common planning time for faculty every other day;
- Faculty-coordinated examination of student work;
- Flexible, heterogeneous grouping to replace student tracking in math;
- Flexible block schedule in lieu of traditional 7-period day;
- Early identification of students at risk, and extended learning opportunities via an instructional lab;
- Strategies for increasing student time on task;
- Efforts to decrease student suspensions;
- Approaches to increase parental involvement as a means to reduce unacceptable student behavior;
- Use of "looping" in Grades 7 and 8;
- Installation of Truancy Court on site;
- A mentoring program for fourteen 1st Year Teachers, a program operating within the WW Professional Development Academy; and,
- Expanded after-school initiatives.

West Warwick High School Presentation

Principal John Scienzo began his presentation by focusing on the need to stimulate student motivation to take the state assessments seriously, and described a series of initiatives the high school implemented this year to foster greater and more meaningful participation. Mr. Scienzo took issue with the identification of the high school as "low performing," stating that he did not believe that the test accurately measured student achievement. The Principal then went on to identify high levels of poverty, student mobility, and a general lack of community valuing of education as major barriers to high academic achievement. However, Superintendent Raiche emphasized that West Warwick does support public education, and in fact has the highest tax effort in Rhode Island.

Principal Scienzo next outlined eight elements to the school's improvement efforts. Among these are emphases on student personalization, differentiated instruction, and standards-based instruction. New initiatives developed at the high school level include programmatic and structural changes; such as schedule redesign, a newly developed grade 9 course of study, and a career center. The school is addressing class-size reduction and the length of the school day. Finally, the high school has renewed professional development activities and opportunities by amending the focus to include:

- Teaching to standards;
- Literacy;
- Development of alternative programs to address student dropout problems;
- Curriculum development and assessment;
- Effective use of certified personnel; and
- Programmatic and structural changes.

RIDE Analysis

The inter-disciplinary team from RIDE made a series of observations based on its review of planning documents, assessment data, SALT survey results, SALT visit reports, Office of Special Needs' School Support visit report, NEASC information, direct observation, and discussion within this meeting.

Maisie Quinn Elementary School:

- Results indicate that 36% of its students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over a three-year period.
- By meeting all targets for ELA, math and writing, Quinn is considered an improving school.

Deering Middle School:

- This school's results indicate that 35% of its students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over a three-year period. Only 2 of 16 targets were met.
- The ELA targets indicate a decline in student performance at the high levels in all subtests. The percentage of students performing at the lowest levels increased or remained static on all ELA subtests.
- In math, the high target was met only in problem solving.
- Very little progress was made towards meeting the low targets in mathematics.

West Warwick High School:

- WWHS results indicate that 49% of its students are performing at the lowest levels of achievement over a three-year period. Five of sixteen targets were met at WWHS.
- In Analysis and Interpretation, both targets were met. In the other ELA subtests, students performing at the highest and lowest levels showed little or no improvement:
 - Basic Understanding: 24% to 25% high; 35.5% to 34.8% low
 - Writing Effectiveness: 8.9% to 8% high; 36% to 37% low
 - Writing Conventions: 56% to 48% high; 14% to 23% low

RIDE/District Agreement

Superintendent Raiche and David Abbott identified the following immediate strategies to improve West Warwick's low performing schools:

- Ensure that professional development activity for staff in ELA, math and writing

has a greater emphasis on standards-based instruction and assessment;

- Develop strategies to support transitory students;
- Maintain and expand successful literacy programs, e.g., REA grant, and K-5 Guided Reading Program;
- Increase the efficacy of strategic planning at the district and school levels, in part by providing specialized training to School Improvement Team members;
- Examine resources to ensure that allocations reflect district needs and priorities;
- Explore avenues to increase administrative stability;
- Eliminate tracking;
- Expand on innovative middle level strategies to reduce the 25% failure rate;
- Expand upon teacher involvement in the mentor and I Plan programs; and
- Shift district emphasis over past five years from elementary to secondary programs.

It was further agreed that all parties would work together towards the betterment of the West Warwick school district and that initial agreements brought forth at the "Face-to-Face" meeting RIDE. Accordingly, included and emphasized in the District Strategic Plan and would be reflected in greater detail in the district's May 1 submission to applicable School Improvement Plans will be the district's specific approaches to improve achievement in mathematics and English language arts, as well as strategies for addressing equity gaps.